Bill, Melinda Gates Give $809,000 Gift to Libraries

Department of Education

News Releases

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Fifty-six of Nova Scotia's public libraries will soon have more computers and increased Internet access thanks to an $809,000 gift from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Education Minister Jane Purves announced today. Separately, Microsoft Canada will donate software with a retail value of $327,000 to the libraries receiving grants.

The grant, part of the Gates Library Initiative, is intended to increase technology access for people who would otherwise not have access to computers and the Internet.

"On behalf of the people of Nova Scotia, I want to thank Bill and Melinda Gates for their generosity," said Ms. Purves. "The Gates Library Initiative will provide more access to technology and the Internet, particularly to those who need access the most."

The partnership between Nova Scotia and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation began in October of 1998 with the launch of the Canadian grant program. Public libraries in many Nova Scotia communities are eligible to receive grants to purchase computer hardware and technology training for library staff.

The grant will provide funding for 114 Internet workstations and the establishment of four regional training centres at libraries in Yarmouth, Halifax, Truro and Sydney starting in the spring of 2000. Staff training and technical support are also included.

According to a July 1999 Statistics Canada study, individuals in the highest-income households are nearly five times more likely to regularly access the Internet than those in the lowest-income households. The goal of the Gates Initiative is to partner with provincial, territorial and state public libraries to provide access to technology for everyone.

"Our public libraries play an important role in educating people of all ages," said Ms. Purves. "This gift, combined with our ongoing initiative of providing public and student access to the Internet, will give more Nova Scotians the tools they need to gain knowledge and find jobs in the growing information economy."

In both the United States and Canada, grants from the foundation are targeted toward libraries that serve low-income communities. Canadian libraries serving populations where 17.6 per cent or more of the population live in poverty are eligible for foundation grants. Figures were determined by the Poverty Profile 1996 report issued by the National Council of Welfare.

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The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation places a major focus on helping to improve people's lives through global health and learning. Since the inception of the Gates Library Initiative in 1997, the foundation has awarded grants of more than $35 million to 2,200 libraries in the United States and Canada. For more information, see **www.gatesfoundation.org** .

FOR BROADCAST USE:

Bill and Melinda Gates are giving a major gift to Nova Scotia's public libraries.

The Gates Foundation is giving 56 libraries in the province 809-thousand dollars.

The money is from the Gates Library Initiative.

It will be used to put more computers and increased Internet access into libraries, especially in low-income communities.

Education Minister Jane Purves says the grant will provide access to technology and the Internet to those who need it the most.

The money will pay for 114 Internet workstations and four regional training centres at libraries in Yarmouth, Halifax, Truro and Sydney starting next spring.

Microsoft Canada will donate another 300-thousand dollars to the libraries.

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